

THE HIDDEN GARDEN

By Victor Redcliffe

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"Bah!" uttered Gilbert Warner, retired business man and village magnate.

"Rubbish, eh?" intimated his companion, fat, indolent and good-natured Judge Walton.

"Franked from Washington, a box of government seeds, and from Congressman Martin Lacey. An insult!" roared the captious Warner. "Why, does he dare to fancy he could buy me a box of vegetable seeds? The scoundrel! I voted against him and next time I'll marshal every friend I have to snow him under. Bah!"

"Hold on—" began his friend, but he spoke too late. With a vim as though he were casting deadly poison from his clasp, Warner gave the box a fling. They had just come from the postoffice and the team side of the street was guarded by an iron fence from the river below. Over the fence went the disdained cardboard box.

"You just do that again!" yelled irate juvenile tones, but too far removed to reach the ears of Warner or his companion.

The package had landed on the head of Nat Borden. He had been lining the narrow bank of the river seeking a quiet place to fish. As the box grazed, tilted and went over into the water, however, he unshipped his pole and ran after it. The box looked substantial. It didn't appear to be empty. Nat cast for it half a dozen times. Finally he hooked it and brought it ashore.

Nat climbed up to and over the iron fence, but no one seemed to be looking for a missing box. He shook it and poked inside. He read the words "Seeds" in big black type on the outside.

"I know what's in it now," he soliloquized, "some of them free seeds from the government. Everybody in

town got a package, I guess, only this is a big box of them. I don't want 'em. I'll give 'em to Miss Winnie."

Miss Winnie was a rare friend of Nat Borden, "a pal," he boasted to his intimate boy friends. She lived with her notional, tyrannical, rheumatic old aunt just next door to the Borden. Winnie was 17 and would have been a tomboy if her strict aunt had allowed her. The conventlike solemnity of the old house had made



"We Shall Have the Earliest Vegetables in Town."

Winnie desperate at times. Miss Dorothy, her aunt, ruled with a rod of iron.

Never was Winnie allowed any freedom save that of the rambling back yard. But she had discovered an adjoining paradise. Over the fence was a discarded overgrown plot of ground belonging to the extensive grounds of the Warner place. There Winnie had swung a hammock between two trees. She had arranged